

What is claimed is:

1. A method for providing bond or guaranty coverage, the method comprising the steps of:

providing an online site having a server operable to receive a bond or guaranty request;

receiving from a first entity a bond or guaranty request;

issuing a bond or guaranty in response to bond or guaranty request; and

generating a unique identifier suitable to display on a computer network evidencing to a second entity that a bond or guaranty is in effect with respect to transactions involving a first entity.

2. The online method described in Claim 1, comprising the further step of:

activating the bond or guaranty coverage upon receipt of a request for coverage from a second entity.

3. The online method as described in Claim 1, comprising the further steps of:

receiving registration information from a first entity; and

registering the first entity in a Registered User Database.

4. The online method as described in Claim 3, comprising the further steps of:

providing a communication to a first entity confirming registration;

providing a secure code to the first entity;

receiving the secure code back from the first entity; and
confirming registration by matching the secure code received from the
first entity with the secure code provided to the first entity.

5 5. The online method as described in Claim 1, wherein the step of
generating a unique identifier comprises further the step of:

posting the unique identifier to a computer network site displaying
transactions involving the first entity.

10 6. The online method as described in Claim 5, wherein the step of posting
the unique identifier comprises:

posting the unique identifier to an online auction site displaying the
first entity's auction listing, the unique identifier evidencing that the auction
listing is covered by a bond or guaranty.

15 7. The online method as described in Claim 6, wherein the step of posting
a unique identifier comprises applying a .gif or .jpg image to the first entity's
auction listing.

20 8. The online method as described in Claim 2, wherein the step of
activating the bond or guaranty coverage comprises the steps of:

providing a link between the unique identifier and the online site;

receiving a coverage request from the second entity; and

providing a confirmation of coverage in response to the submitted

25 coverage request.

9. The online method as described in Claim 8, wherein the step of receiving a coverage request further comprises the steps of:

entering the coverage request into an Activations Database; and
activating the bond or guaranty coverage.

10. The online method as described in Claim 1, comprising the further step of:

processing a bond or guaranty request, the processing step comprising:
creating a record of request in an Applications Database; and
reviewing the bond or guaranty request to assign a risk
worthiness level based on a credit rating for the first entity.

11. The online method as described in Claim 10, wherein the step of processing a bond or guaranty request further comprises the steps of:

evaluating a request using an Automated Bond or Guaranty
Application Review Process, the Review Process comprising the steps of:
determining whether a request is complete; and
evaluating a request for information that requires rejection of the
request.

12. The online method as described in Claim 10, wherein the step of reviewing the bond request to assign a risk worthiness level further comprises assigning a risk exposure level based on bond or guaranty coverage value

being requested and/or the characteristic of the transaction for which coverage is requested.

13. The online method as described in Claim 1, wherein the step of generating a unique identifier further comprises the step of:

generating a Bond Margin Gauge, the Bond Margin Gauge corresponding to the difference between the bond or guaranty coverage limit and a value assigned to the transactions involving a first entity.

14. The online method as described in Claim 13, wherein the step of generating a Bond Margin Gauge further comprises:

posting the Bond Margin Gauge on an online auction site, the Bond Margin Gauge providing a value equal to the difference between the first entity's bond or guaranty coverage limit and the sum total for the high bid in each of the first entity's auction listings that are presently open.

15. The online method as described in Claim 1, comprising the further steps of:

providing a link between the unique identifier and the online site; and displaying on the online site a verification page indicating that the first entity has bond or guaranty coverage.

16. An online method to enable a first entity to serve as surety for a second entity, the method comprising the steps of:

providing an online site having a server operable to receive a bond request;

receiving a bond request;

conducting a preauthorization of a charge to a specified account;

5 issuing a bond, wherein the first entity serves as a surety; and

conducting a re-preauthorization of a charge to a specified account after the occurrence or nonoccurrence of a specified condition and/or a period of time has passed.

10 17. The online method described in Claim 16, comprising the further step of:

charging payment to the specified account to renew the bond following expiration of the bond.

15 18. The online method described in Claim 17, comprising the further step of:

generating an unique identifier suitable to display on a computer network evidencing to a third entity that a bond is in effect with respect to transactions involving a second entity, wherein the first entity serves as a
20 surety.

19. The online method described in Claim 16, comprising the further step of:

activating the bond or guaranty coverage upon receipt of a request for
25 coverage from a third entity.

20. The online method described in Claim 18, comprising the further step of:

activating the bond or guaranty coverage upon receipt of a request for coverage from a third entity.

21. The online method as described in Claim 17, comprising the further step of:

communicating a suspension notice to the first entity if the bond renewal is unsuccessful.

22. An online method for providing online bond or guaranty coverage, the method comprising the steps of:

providing an online site having a server operable to receive a bond or guaranty request;

issuing a bond or guaranty to a first entity in response to a bond or guaranty request;

generating a unique identifier suitable to display on a computer network evidencing to a second entity that a bond or guaranty is in effect with respect to transactions involving a first entity; and

receiving a claim from the second entity in response to a first entity default.

23. The online method described in Claim 22, comprising the further step of:

activating the bond or guaranty coverage upon receipt of a request for coverage from a second entity.

24. The online method as described in Claim 22, comprising the further steps of:

entering the claim into a Claims Database; and
paying claim to the second entity.

25. The online method as described in Claim 22, comprising the further steps of:

providing a link between the unique identifier and the online site; and
providing a location on the online site for the input of coverage request information.

26. The online method as described in Claim 23, comprising the further step of:

providing a confirmation of coverage to a second entity upon activation of coverage.

27. The online method as described in Claim 24, wherein the step of paying the claim to the second entity comprises:

receiving claim information from a second entity;
creating record of claim information in a Claims Database;
evaluating claim information; and
providing a claim payment to the second entity.

28. The online method as described in Claim 27, wherein the step of evaluating the claim information comprises the further step of:

assessing claim information provided by second entity to determine whether the second entity owes any financial obligations to the online site.

29. The online method as described in Claim 22, comprising the further step of:

notifying first entity of a second entity claim;

providing a claim dispute process for first entity, the claim dispute process comprising:

requesting information from the first entity that supports dispute;

receiving information from the second entity to rebut the first entity's information;

upholding or striking claim in response to information provided by the first and/or second entity.

30. An online method for providing online bond or guaranty coverage, the method comprising the steps of:

providing an online site having a server operable to receive a bond request;

receiving a bond request for an online buyer;

registering the online buyer with the online site;

providing the online buyer with the ability to select a standard bond or a preferred bond; and

issuing a bond in response to the bond request by the online buyer.

31. The online method described in Claim 30, comprising the further steps of:

accepting payment for the standard or preferred bond; and

providing an online seller with payment in the event of a default by the online buyer.

32. An online method for providing online bond or guaranty coverage, the method comprising the steps of:

providing an online site having a server operable to receive a bond or guaranty request;

receiving a bond or guaranty request from a first entity;

processing the bond or guaranty request;

issuing a bond or guaranty to the first entity in response to the bond request;

displaying an unique identifier to an online auction site carrying the first entity's auction listing, the unique identifier evidencing that the first entity's auction listing is covered by a bond.

33. The online method described in Claim 32, comprising the further step of:

activating the bond or guaranty coverage upon receipt of a request for coverage.

issuing a bond in response to the bond request by the online buyer.

31. The online method described in Claim 30, comprising the further steps of:

5 accepting payment for the standard or preferred bond; and
providing an online seller with payment in the event of a default by the
online buyer.

32. An online method for providing online bond or guaranty coverage, the
10 method comprising the steps of:

providing an online site having a server operable to receive a bond or
guaranty request;

receiving a bond or guaranty request from a first entity;

processing the bond or guaranty request;

15 issuing a bond or guaranty to the first entity in response to the bond
request;

displaying an unique identifier to an online auction site carrying the
first entity's auction listing, the unique identifier evidencing that the first
entity's auction listing is covered by a bond.

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33. The online method described in Claim 32, comprising the further step
of:

activating the bond or guaranty coverage upon receipt of a request for
coverage.

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34. The online method as described in Claim 32, comprising the further step of:

providing an HTML code to the first entity for the unique identifier.

5 35. The online method as described in Claim 32, comprising the further step of:

receiving a URL for each Web page the unique identifier is to be displayed on before providing an HTML code to the first entity for the unique identifier.

10 36. The online method as described in Claim 32, wherein the step of processing a bond request comprises further the step of:

creating a record of request in an Applications Database.

15 37. An online method for providing online bond or guaranty coverage, the method comprising the steps of:

providing an online site having a server operable to receive a bond or guaranty request;

receiving from a first entity a bond or guaranty request;

20 issuing a bond or guaranty in response to bond or guaranty request; and

generating a unique identifier suitable to display on a computer network evidencing to a second entity that a bond or guaranty is in effect with respect to transactions involving a third entity.

38. The online method described in Claim 37, wherein a first entity and third entity are the same entity.

39. The online method described in Claim 37, comprising the further step of:

activating the bond or guaranty coverage upon receipt of a request for coverage from a second entity.

40. The online method as described in Claim 37, comprising the further step of:

processing a bond request received from the first entity, the processing step comprising:

creating a record of request in an Applications Database; and

reviewing the bond request to assign risk worthiness level based on a credit rating for a third entity.

41. The online method as described in Claim 37, wherein the step of generating a unique identifier further comprises the step of:

generating a Bond Margin Gauge, the Bond Margin Gauge corresponding to the difference between the bond or guaranty coverage limit and a value assigned to the transactions involving the third entity.

42. The online method as described in Claim 41, wherein the step of generating a Bond Margin Gauge further comprises:

posting the Bond Margin Gauge on an online auction site, the Bond Margin Gauge providing a value equal to the difference between the first entity's bond or guaranty coverage limit and the sum total for the high bid in each of the third entity's auction listings that are presently open.

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43. The online method as described in Claim 41, wherein the step of generating a Bond Margin Gauge further comprises:

posting the Bond Margin Gauge on an online auction site, the Bond Margin Gauge providing a value equal to the difference between the first entity's bond or guaranty coverage limit and the sum of the sum total of the high bids in each of the third entity's auction listings that are open and the sum total of the winning bids in each of the third entity's auction listings that have closed, but for which the period during which a claim can be filed has not closed.

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44. The online method as described in Claim 13, wherein the step of generating a Bond Margin Gauge further comprises:

posting the Bond Margin Gauge on an online auction site, the Bond Margin Gauge providing a value equal to the difference between the first entity's bond or guaranty coverage limit and the sum of the sum total of the high bids in each of the first entity's auction listings that are open and the sum total of the winning bids in each of the first entity's auction listings that have closed, but for which the period during which a claim can be filed has not closed.

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45. The online method as described in Claim 10, comprising the further step of:

adjusting bond coverage based upon changes in the assigned Risk Worthiness Level.

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46. The online method as described in Claim 1, comprising the further step of:

processing the first entity's guaranty request, the processing step comprising:

10 creating a record of request in an Applications Database; and
reviewing the guaranty request to assign risk worthiness level based on first entity's experience or credit rating.

47. The online method as described in Claim 11, wherein the step of
15 evaluating the request using an Automated Bond or Guaranty Application Review Process comprises the further steps of:

creating a Flagged Database containing information on a given entity that warrants rejection of a bond or guaranty request by that entity; and

20 comparing request information input by the first entity to the information stored in the Flagged Database.

48. The online method as described in Claim 1, comprising the further step of:

providing an Experience Rating for the first entity having a value that indicates the level of bond or guaranty issuance to the first entity that does not result in claims by a buyer.

5 49. The online method as described in Claim 1, comprising the further steps of:

 receiving claim request against the first entity from the second entity;
 evaluating claim request against first entity; and
 paying claim to second entity.

10 50. The online method as described in Claim 49, comprising the further step of entering claim request into a Claims Database.

15 51. A method for displaying on an online auction site the coverage limit remaining a given bond or guaranty, the method comprising the steps of:

 generating a Bond Margin Gauge, the Bond Margin Gauge
 corresponding to the difference between the bond or guaranty coverage limit
 and a value assigned to the transactions involving a first entity on an online
 auction site, and

20 displaying the Bond Margin Gauge on an online auction site.

52. The online method as described in Claim 51, wherein the step of
generating a Bond Margin Gauge a Bond Margin Gauge providing a value
equal to the difference between the first entity's bond or guaranty coverage

limit and the sum total for the high bid in each of the first entity's auction listings that are presently open.

53. The online method as described in Claim 51, wherein the step of
5 generating a Bond Margin Gauge comprises a Bond Margin Gauge providing
a value equal to the difference between the first entity's bond or guaranty
coverage limit and the sum of the sum total of the high bids in each of the first
entity's auction listings that are open and the sum total of the winning bids in
each of the first entity's auction listings that have closed, but for which the
10 period during which a claim can be filed has not closed.

54. A method for conducting an internet auction having the auction bonded
through the auction site, the method comprising the steps of:

15 providing a first server operable to host an online auction, the server in
communication with a first database having information relating to whether
bonds are in effect; and

displaying an image in an area on the online auction under exclusive
control of operator of the first server, the image evidencing that at least one of
the parties to the auction is bonded.

20 55. The method described in claim 54, comprising further the step of:

providing an informational link between the first database and a second
database, whereby the information in the two databases is continually updated
to mirror each other.

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56. A method for conducting an online auction, the method comprising the steps of:

providing a server configured to host an online auction;

providing a deposit account into which a first entity can make a

deposit of funds;

receiving electronic funds transfer information for a second entity; and

after an auction has closed, transferring funds from the deposit account of a first entity to an account specified by a second entity using electronic funds transfer information provided by the second entity.

57. A method of collateralizing a credit card, the method comprising the steps of:

receiving credit account information from a first entity;

conducting a preauthorization of a charge to a user's account;

after an occurrence or nonoccurrence of a specified condition and/or a period of time has passed, voiding the preauthorization and conducting a re-preauthorization of a charge to the same user's account.

58. A system to enable online purchasing by a principal of a surety bond, the system comprising:

a server computer in communication with a client computer, the server computer operable to receive bond or guaranty request from a client computer;

a server computer program operable to process, evaluate and approve a bond or guaranty request, wherein a bond or guaranty request is approved and made legally binding without human review of the request.

59. A method for preventing the piracy of an online image, the method comprising the steps of:

generating a first image for display at a specified image address, the first image displaying a first expiration date;

generating a second image that is different than the first image, the second image displaying a second expiration date;

replacing the first image with the second image, so that the second image displays the second expiration date at the specified image address.

60. A system for bonding an auction listing on an online auction site, the system comprising:

a server operable to host an online auction site, the server being connected by a computer network to a client computer, the server operable to receive bond or guaranty request information from the client computer;

a database connected to the server, the database adapted to receive bond or guaranty request information;

a first computer program operable to process bond or guaranty request information; and

an unique identifier displayed by the server indicating the existence of bond or guaranty coverage for a given auction listing.

61. The system claimed in Claim 60, wherein the unique identifier appears in HTML pages served by the server computer.

62. A method for providing a surety bond to an Internet auction user, the method comprising the steps of:

providing a server operable to receive a bond application;

assigning at least one value to the bond application, the value being

based upon information provided in the bond application;

issuing a provisional bond when the value meets a predetermined threshold; and

after the issuance of a provisional bond, issuing a formal bond following manual review of the bond application.

63. A method for conducting an Internet auction, the method comprising the steps of:

providing a server operable to host an Internet auction;

providing a database adapted to retain information relating to bonding of users of an Internet auction site;

discounting the closing price of the auction when the winning bidder in the auction is bonded.

64. A method for providing electronic payment services to users of an Internet auction site, the method comprising the steps of:

providing a server operable to receive a first entity's auction site user account information;

providing the first entity with a deposit account uniquely related to the first entity's auction site user account;

providing a server operable to receive second entity's auction site user account information;

retaining electronic funds transfer information that is uniquely related to the second entity's auction site user account;

5 providing a server configured to receive information indicating that an Internet auction has closed; and

providing a computer program that electronically transfers funds from the first entity deposit account to the second entity after an auction has closed and the first entity is the winning bidder in an auction and the second entity is the seller.

65. A method for providing electronic payment services to users of an Internet auction site, the method comprising the steps of:

providing a server operable to register a first entity, the first entity being an auction site bidder;

opening a deposit account specific to the first entity;

providing a server operable to monitor the status of an Internet auction; at the close of the Internet auction, providing funds from the first entity's deposit account to a second entity where the second entity is a seller on an Internet auction site and the first entity is the winning bidder.

66. The method described in claim 65, comprising the further step of:

conducting a preauthorization of a charge to the first entity's credit card; and

charging the first entity's card to provide funds to the first entity's
deposit account.

67. The method described in claim 65, comprising the further steps of:
5 providing the first entity with the option of obtaining a preferred bond
or standard bond.

68. The method described in claim 65, wherein the step of providing funds
10 to the second entity comprises transferring the funds from the first entity's d
deposit account to the second entity immediately after the auction closes.